

River Anders

History 129a

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### A Personal Reflection on the Coronavirus Pandemic

Introductory Note: UCLA Senior, History Major.

With the rise of the Corona virus pandemic in 2020, this has been an incredibly trying and difficult event for our personal lives and the world at large. What remains to be unique to me in my perspective is that it has ubiquitously affected all social classes economically and socially to some degree. In my understanding, it has been evident that the people who have the burden of being in poverty or face the social hardships of being a minority. Always face a much more difficult challenge when it comes to disease and social hardships, while the upper classes are often protected or blind to the immense tragedy of a situation like this. However, I do not argue that the people who have the benefit of wealth are struggling as much as those in poverty. I cannot begin to imagine the difficulties that families who had struggled financially prior to the Coronavirus pandemic are facing now. My heart weighs heavy in this time as I desperately hope our communities and the world find solutions to recover from the economic and social effects of this pandemic. A question I have raised for myself in this difficult time is how do people react when they are forced into a Chaos completely unique to what we have known our whole lives? What this pandemic has meant for me is learning how to think beyond my selfish desires of wanting the country to reopen prematurely, so I can pursue the state of normalcy that I knew before. In a sense, to embrace a sense of responsibility that understands the precautions I am taking may affect my community and save the lives of those at risk.

The most notable aspect the Covid-19 pandemic has changed about my life and my family's, is the economic repercussions we have faced since the shutdown of the economy. My entire life I did not understand what it meant to struggle financially as my family more often than not afforded the blessing of being financially well off. I grew up in Las Vegas for the first half of my childhood and then moved to San Diego with my father for the rest of it where I consider home. My mother owns a successful business in Las Vegas that relied entirely on tourism as a source of income. Las Vegas is currently on a complete lock down quarantine with no tourists which has essentially put my mother out of business. My father on the other hand, works in medical dentistry in San Diego where he has had to lay off a massive portion of his employees and take a salary cut in its entirety to keep the company alive. The effects of financial struggles weigh heavily on any family and has proven to be the source of most conflicts within mine. As well, I was laid off from my job serving food at a restaurant in Beverly Hills which allowed me to be financially independent while being a student. I define a great deal of happiness within my life through my achievements and productivity. However, this pandemic has forced me to move back home and witness the effects that stress, and depression have on people like my parents. This pandemic has taught me that while life and society has always seemed so normal and secure, it is actually a fickle system that can be incredibly vulnerable. Although, it has revealed to me as well that financial security is not the only thing that defines happiness. While my family and I are managing to get through this and will be fine in the long run, I have realized that life needs purpose to find fulfillment. This quarantine has proven to be a time of reflection for many and during this time I have come to realize that a life without purpose and striving towards my passions feels empty.

My experiences within my community of San Diego have been unique in seeing how people react to the state of chaos this pandemic has created. It is evident the city is heavily participating in and torn by an argument of Democratic and Republican differences that echoes throughout our country's history. A great deal of republicans in San Diego have rose up in free assembly to protest the lock down and argue we should have the right to choose to remain in quarantine or not. For example, in the San Diego town of Encinitas on April 19<sup>th</sup>, a protest arose of what seemed to be around fifty to a hundred people on the pacific coast highway. They were holding up signs that had phrases such as, "This is punishment, not protection", and "Leave social distancing to us". It sounds wildly like a problem of privilege but one of the primary issues they were arguing is to reopen the beaches in San Diego. The issue I see with that argument is prior to the state mandating beach lockdowns, people were travelling from all over California to spend the day at the beach resulting in record breaking crowds. This is entirely irresponsible as a state in taking precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. However, San Diego has come to a new system for its beaches at the beginning of May that I agree is a timely and responsible alternative. They have allowed people on the beach again only for active reasons that demonstrate social distancing such as walking and surfing. Surfing has been one of my greatest passions since I was a child and I was obviously pleased to be able to partake in this again. I do not believe there is any harm in these activities as long as people remain to be responsible and socially distant, until society is certain we are not in danger of a massive outbreak again.

One of the biggest issues I have had personally in maintaining the behavior to act socially responsible and believe in the precautionary measures our country and governors are taking. Is that I do not personally know a single person who has contracted the coronavirus or seen any

signs of an unhealthy community. The streets of San Diego are bustling with healthy people walking around and there is no talk of any families struggling with the virus. However, I am well aware this is not the case in cities like New York and other metropolises around the world. I continuously need to remind and ask myself, is this to the credit of quarantine and taking drastic social distancing measures? I understand it is an incredibly selfish thought to think, is it not that serious? Are we overreacting in this pandemic? Nonetheless, from what I have experienced in my community it is a thought that I shamefully endure. It is shameful because at times it feels like I am asking the question, is my desires to live normally again more important than someone's life? Furthermore, this pandemic has once again become a learning experience for me revealing that I need to think beyond my own environment and desires. So much of my life and behaviors have been driven around what I want to pursue and do with my time. For the first time it seems like I have to truly consider how my actions affect the people around me and even those I do not know.

In many ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed a specific correlation to instances of the smallpox epidemics that occurred within the Indigenous populations of the Americas. When looking at how the smallpox disease greatly ravaged the indigenous communities and left them vulnerable to being conquered by the Spanish Empire. It can show how the Coronavirus has torn apart certain areas of our country and reveal the flaws within our own medical systems. In the same way that a pandemic left the Aztec's in the 16<sup>th</sup> century vulnerable to the Spaniards overthrowing Tenochtitlan. The Coronavirus has left the United States and most other parts of the world vulnerable to a complete economic and social collapse. In the document the Siege of Tenochtitlan, the account explains that, "This period of normalcy was soon ended by the terrible plague that quickly spread through the city. The plague seems to have been an epidemic of

smallpox, which was previously unknown among the Indians”.<sup>1</sup> We knew a life within our society similar to the Aztecs, that we never imagined or prepared to be so drastically altered by an instance like this. Furthermore, smallpox impacted the people within Tenochtitlan similarly to the ways Covid-19 has attacked our people. For example, the document shows that, “The illness was so dreadful that no one could walk or move. The sick were so utterly helpless that they could only lie on their beds like corpses, unable to move their limbs or even their heads”.<sup>2</sup> In its worst cases the Coronavirus has taken the same toll on its victims and horrifically wiped out huge populations similarly to the smallpox epidemics. What remains to be so confusing about Covid-19 is that it effects people dramatically different. The Aztecs experienced this to a degree when mentioned that, “Some people came down with a milder form of the disease; they suffered less than the others and made a good recovery”.<sup>3</sup> However, they still suffered long term effects that scarred their skin and left some blind. When examining the differences and similarities of our pandemic to this one prior, I believe this pandemic has taught me to be more understanding and mindful of the hardships our world has faced in the past. Although, while it is deeply saddening to see the effects that a pandemic has had on societies in the past, as well as our own. I believe it also reveals that they have recovered from such a difficult time and we shall too.

Digressing back to my own personal experiences of this pandemic, in all honesty this time of our lives has been incredibly difficult and saddening for me. Some days are better than others as I find ways to be productive under the strict quarantine laws. However, watching the stress my parents have endured from this pandemic is difficult to manage. Out of every bit of

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<sup>1</sup> Florentine Codex, *The Siege of Tenochtitlan*, 125

<sup>2</sup> Florentine Codex, *The Siege of Tenochtitlan*, 125

<sup>3</sup> Florentine Codex, *The Siege of Tenochtitlan*, 125

love I have for my family, I hope to find ways to make this process easier for them and watch them thrive again. On the other hand, I am incredibly grateful that we are going into this difficult time as healthy people and have not suffered the horrors it has brought upon other families. I often think about the fact that the average suicide rate for Americans has dramatically increased since the Pandemic began. This raises the question that is our system of operating under this immense economy and social structure this incredibly flawed? So much so that after two months of malfunctioning, so many important lives felt the need to take themselves away from this world prematurely? Once again, I am reminded that life is sensitive and so many of our values as a society prior to this pandemic may be irrelevant to humanity.

Speculating on the nature of the world after this pandemic, I whole heartedly believe our representatives of power need to make changes to our economy and healthcare system. Not only to be able to withstand future Covid-19 outbreaks, but to also serve better those in poverty that have been misrepresented for so long in the past. A strong economy is not the meaning of life and people should not be killing themselves because it collapses. Neither should families be starving or drowning in medical bills that our society is well aware are cripplingly high. While this pandemic may have affected me harshly because of the economic collapse, it has taught me that financial well being is not the true meaning of life. The pandemic has revealed to me that staying together as a society and thinking beyond our own selfish desires to benefit even those you do not know, is a true purpose for life, as well as a purpose for humanity.